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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000549

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STATE FOR EUR/CE

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SUBJECT: SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS: LOTS OF MEETINGS,  
LITTLE CONSENSUS

REF: A) BRATISLAVA 516 AND PREVIOUS B) BUDAPEST 1102

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Keith Eddins for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. Charge and Pol/Econ Chief met on November 19 with the special advisor to Prime Minister Fico and Foreign Minister Kubis for Slovak-Hungarian relations, former Foreign Minister Pavol Hamzik. Hamzik stated that nationalist leader Jan Slota is "damaging Slovak foreign policy and Slovakia's reputation," but reserved his harshest criticism for Pal Csaky and other ethnic Hungarians who form a sort of "fifth column." A letter from Hungarian PM Gyurcsany outlining six steps to reduce bilateral tensions has been received here with resentment, according to Hamzik. None of Gyurcsany's recommendations will be agreed by the Slovak side, nor does it appear that the PM Fico will authorize an investigation into the police action at the Dunajska Streda soccer match.

¶2. (C) Comment: It's a positive signal that the two Prime Ministers finally met. A raft of upcoming high-level meetings between Slovak and Hungarian officials is also encouraging, as are the GOS's recent pledges to support economic development in the southern border region. However, like our colleagues at Embassy Budapest, we doubt that the fundamental causes of the problems, e.g., Jan Slota, will be addressed adequately. And, the fact that so many of the GOH's recent requests will be rebuffed could set relations back further. End comment and summary.

¶3. (C) FM Kubis's senior advisor, Pavol Hamzik, laid blame on a wide range of actors for the current state of Hungarian-Slovak relations: Slovak National Party (SNS) Chairman Jan Slota; Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) members Pal Csaky and Miklos Duray; Fidesz and its "revisionist" sentiment; and PM Gyurcsany, for his seeming inability to clamp down on Hungarian radicals and hooligans and for his interference in Slovak domestic affairs, i.e., treatment of minorities.

¶4. (C) Regarding Slota, Hamzik told us that PM Fico had spoken to him and that he expected Slota would be quiet, but only for awhile. As many other informed Slovak interlocutors have said, the current coalition works well for PM Fico, and it is highly unlikely that Fico will jettison Slota, even when (not if) he acts up again. As for 2010, Hamzik dismissed the notion that Smer would invite SMK into the government, given current relations. Hamzik reserved his harshest rhetoric for SMK Chair Pal Csaky. Hamzik characterized Csaky as a "radical" who feels more at home in Budapest than in Bratislava. He and his colleagues form a "fifth column" in Slovakia and their membership in the Hungarian MPs of the Carpathian Basin Forum is a disloyal act.

15. (C) Although it was Post's impression that PM Gyurcsany had presented his six-point proposal for reducing tensions to PM Fico at their Komarno meeting, Hamzik stated unequivocally that Gyurcsany had not raised the points (e.g. calls for creating an ombudsman for minority rights in Slovakia or allowing minority students to use textbooks published in the other country) in the meeting, but in a subsequent letter. Hamzik bristled at language such as this: "My government will prepare and submit relevant draft bills within 30 days. You are kindly requested to ensure that the Government of Slovakia proceeds in a similar manner." He noted sarcastically that Hungary has more than one ombudsman who deals with minority issues, yet it has virtually "no minorities." He said that the majority of Slovaks had been assimilated and that there are very few Slovak schools in Hungary. It was thus hypocritical of the Hungarians to make demands on the Slovaks, and in any case, treatment of minorities in Slovakia is "above standard."

16. (C) Hamzik unreservedly described the police intervention at the Dunajska Streda soccer match as "good," saying it was important to send a strong signal to "extremists." As we met with Hamzik in Bratislava, the Slovak government held a session in Komarno. After the meeting, Fico reiterated his view that the Slovak police intervention was lawful and appropriate and that the government does not intend to investigate the matter further. PM Fico also said that although he didn't agree with the SMK's proposal for Hungarian textbooks, the time was ripe for a solution to the issue in Parliament.

17. (C) Despite Fico's stance on Dunajska Streda and his all but certain rejection of PM Gyurcsany's six requests, he is

nevertheless moving on multiple fronts to calm the situation. The government session in Komarno and his pledges to support construction of highways and other critical infrastructure (schools, sewage treatment plants, industrial parks) in southern Slovakia are an example. In the meantime, the government has moved with lightning speed -- to the dismay of NGOs and other critics -- to adopt stricter laws on extremism (see Bratislava Highlights), per the Prime Ministers' joint statement. (Comment: DCM will meet with Pal Csaky on November 24. Although we cannot be certain, we can't help but wonder whether Csaky's positive statements in the wake of the PM's meeting, and the promises made by PM Fico to aid SMK's stronghold, don't signal another behind-the-scenes deal between Fico and SMK, which desires strongly to enter the next government. Another possibility is that Csaky, the locus of so much criticism from Slovak politicians and from some in his own party, will lose his job so that SMK doesn't lose its chance to govern again. End comment.)

18. (C) Finally, according to Hamzik, Fico has told Jan Slota to keep quiet. If the November 21 issue of the daily Sme is any indication, Slota's quiescence will be short-lived. Following a meeting with the Prime Minister, Slota contradicted Fico's account of their conversation and then told reporters that his statements were not the cause of worsening bilateral relations: "only a blind and deaf person cannot see that these are just excuses. That someone said about somebody else that her hair is not combed and that this will result in WW III practically...is absolutely ridiculous."

19. (C) Comment and conclusion: Looking at the two Prime Ministers, it's clear Fico is playing from a position of relative strength: he remains broadly popular at home, he dominates his coalition, and his country's economy is not on the brink. And yet, Hamzik (who was hand-picked by Fico to deal with the Hungarian issue) articulated once again the fundamental insecurity (cloaked in bluster) that characterizes the Slovak position. Although he repeatedly stated that Slovakia is "not afraid," he made clear how uneasy the Slovaks are about even the mention of cultural or educational autonomy for Hungarians and by SMK's participation in the Carpathian Forum. "We're not stupid, he said, we know how it started in Yugoslavia." This mixture of

insecurity and pride and nationalism is unlikely to foster a very flexible or open stance on the part of the Slovaks. And PM Fico's decision to keep Slota in the coalition creates the clear impression that Fico believes he benefits from Slota's anti-Hungarian rhetoric. Thus, while Post believes the recent high-level contacts are positive, we make no predictions that tensions won't spike again given the failure to address its root causes.

¶10. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Budapest.  
EDDINS